

## Tuominen, S., Kotilainen, S. (2012) *Pedagogies of Media and Information Literacies*. UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education: Moscow.

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The handbook “Pedagogies of Media and Information Literacies” was written in 2012 and published by the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education, one of the organizations which has most actively been involved in developing foundations for media and information literacy in Europe, and is the result of the initiatives arising from the book “Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers”. It was devised by a team of experts in the area and its main aim is to encourage teachers to teach the basic skills required to deal with media in contemporary life.

The handbook is divided into five modules which seek to : 1) contextualize the need for Media Education in the society we live in and define the concept of *Media and Information Literacy*, 2) demonstrate that children occupy a place as a global audience as well as participative citizens in media and in society , 3) give an historical overview of the development of media and media cultures, 4) point out ways to critically interpret media, and , 5) provide examples of activities and initiatives which have had positive results in terms of Media Education (not covered in this review ). As far as the target group is concerned , the book was designed not only for teachers whose schools have the Media Literacy curriculum , with the purpose of helping them address and work on the issue, but also for anyone who has shown an interest in promoting non- formal education in this area. Therefore, using a didactic and dynamic writing style, the authors focus on practical pedagogical practices and show how to teach as well as learn about Media Literacy, including exercises for teachers and for students aged 13 to 17.

The first module addresses the issue of media dependency, a typical feature of today’s society which has no way of avoiding the media, specially since the emergence of new technologies, and highlights the need for acquiring new media and information interpretation skills as a key factor for success today , particularly for young people (p. 9). This view had already been put forward by Sonia Livingstone in the early 21st century, in 2002 to be exact, when she stated that technological development had enabled information to reach us through a wide range of means that were easily and quickly accessible, giving rise to a whole new media culture. Nevertheless, well before then, the renowned Grunwald Declaration on Media Education ,issued by UNESCO in 1982 and approved by 19 nations, already mentioned the importance of “preparing the young person for living in a world of powerful images, words and sounds”.

The module also tackles the concept *Media and Information Literacy*, essentially splitting “Information Literacy” from “Media Literacy”. It considers that the former pertains to the fundamental competences required to obtain, understand, evaluate, adapt

and generate information for problem analysis or decision-making. The latter, on the other hand, despite the variety of terms used to refer to it, is regarded as a critical attitude towards media environments and the ability to express oneself through media. The two concepts are then brought together with the authors stating that the combination *Media and Information Literacy* forms a set of skills without which the 21<sup>st</sup> century-citizens would be unable to understand the world they live in. ( p.14). In this context, the authors restate both the importance of obtaining social and individual skills to deal with media and the need to foster Media Education, be it formal or informal. Indeed, empowering citizens to critically use the media is, according to Gonnet (2007), a need that arises from the emergence of the media themselves.

In fact, the concept of Media Literacy Education which is most widely adopted in Europe comes close to what is stated in the book. The European concept of media literacy makes an explicit reference to “the ability to access the media, and to understand and critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media content. Media literacy also includes the ability to communicate in a variety of contexts”. (European Commission Recommendation, 2009).

It should be pointed out that this issue is given ample theoretical coverage in the module, but there is also a strong practical component with suggested exercises for teachers and students.

The focus of module 2, “Young People as Global Media Audience”, is on children and teenagers and aims to provide an overview of young people as audience, reflect on the importance of media in the construction of identity and to demonstrate how media may be used within democracy and citizenship, thereby furthering the discussion initiated in the previous section (p.31).

The authors, therefore, begin by underlining that the ways of using media are in constant change and that young people today do not see the world the same way as adults since they grew up in completely different media environments. In fact, according to Thomas (2011), the only reality young people born since the 1990s are familiar with is the digital and technological world and, as a result, they regard the way information circulates nowadays as natural. Based on this view, and according to the authors of *Pedagogies of Media and Information Literacies*, young people use media, namely digital media, in a much more active way, having a social role similar to that of the adults’, which can only happen in the virtual world.

The authors reflect, additionally, on the key role of television, radio, newspapers and the internet in personality development and on the duty adults have to ensure moderation particularly in access to contents that may display violent, sexual or extremist attitudes. However, the authors’ line of thought seems to be similar to Ito *et al* (2010), who support the use of new media as tools for sharing ideas, for broadening knowledge and for the development of the personal and collective “I” . They consider active and conscious participation to be a duty of citizens living in a democracy in 21<sup>st</sup> century Europe as it promotes freedom of speech and thought (p. 40).

This chapter also presents an experiment carried out with young people from various countries, in which they were asked to keep diaries with the purpose of showing their relationship with media in their everyday life and as citizens in a globalised world.

Based on a holistic perspective, module three provides a portrayal of media culture from the early beginnings of media to the present day. The socio-cultural meanings of media, the impact of digitalisation and the birth of the information society, the history of development of media devices and technologies and, finally, regulation and ethical rules of media are described (p. 57). In fact, digital literacy was declared as one of the “key competences for lifelong learning” by the European Parliament and European Council Recommendation (2006) and has taken on greater importance in the current backdrop.

Module four is called “How to interpret Media” and, as the name suggests, has a practical purpose and makes concrete suggestions on how to critically interpret a variety of media content. What is highlighted is the importance of understanding how media construct their stories, how they shape the information they present and the techniques they employ to organise material. Furthermore, the authors stress the power media have to decide whose views are represented and whose are not thereby determining what is reported and from what point of view. The main aims of this module are, essentially, to ascertain the criteria behind a news story and its structure, analyse narration in a film, TV programme or music video, show the need for an assessment of the reliability of online information, and foster the production of content. (p.83).

By resorting to examples, the module engages the reader (as if in a “how to do” class) in discovering the mysteries of media. It underlines the fact that the news item is not the event *per se*, but rather an interpretation made of it by the journalist. After all, no matter how unbiased journalists may attempt to be, they are always part of a specific context which leads them to opt to highlight one point and leave out another (Buckingham, 2003). Another concern of this module is to describe how advertising has an interest in weaving itself into the news, particularly in digital contexts, and creating images which have positive connotations. In addition, it draws attention to the need to look at the digital world as a place where anyone can share the information they want to, make up data or news and even deceive others. The module concludes with the view that to be a media literate citizen it is also necessary to know how to produce media content with a critical mind and creative thinking

“Pedagogies of Media and Information Literacies” sets out a relaxed and pedagogical way to deal with topical and essential issues concerning the concepts of literacy, media and citizenship. Nevertheless, its weakness lies in not considering the family as a relevant element in the process of assimilating what was taught in the school context. There is, therefore, room for a handbook which can overcome the limitations of this type of school learning and embrace the family context as a natural element in this path. ✍

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